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Sheldon Cheney

CONVERSATIONS WITH SHELDON CHENEY

An Interview Conducted by
J.R.K. Kantor
Suzanne Riess

Friday services for art critic Sheldon Cheney

BERKELEY — A memorial service will be held Friday for Sheldon Cheney, a prestigious art historian and critic who has long been associated with the Department of Dramatic Art at UC-Berkeley.

Mr. Cheney died Friday at the age of 94. He was born in Berkeley in a two-story wood house that still stands on the eastern corner of the campus and has been used for classes and other activities.

He left Berkeley before the age of 30 and went to New Jersey where he wrote the 13 books of theater and art history and criticism for which is is known. Eleven of the books are still in print today and are used as textbooks in the dramatic arts classes.

He was the first American to praise the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and helped further the architect's career. He also started the magazine "Theater Arts."

Although he lived for 60 years in the East, he and his family maintained a close interest in the affairs of his native city. His mother, May L. Cheney, was dean of women at the university for a short period of time and was responsible for the creation of the Placement Center. Cheney Hall, the residence hall, is named in her honor.

His brother Charles H. Cheney was the first UC-Berkeley graduate in architecture, in 1905. Another brother, Marshall, practiced medicine in Berkeley for more than 30 years. Sheldon, who returned to the campus in 1976 to celebrate his 90th birthday, is the last of his generation.

His survivors include his son John, of Washington D.C., and daughter Elizabeth, of Los Angeles.

Two years ago the dramatic arts department established the Sheldon Cheney Award for Excellence in Research and Critical Writing, which is shared each year by an undergraduate and graduate student. The family suggests that remembrances be directed to this award.

Chronicle Oct. 16, '80

? 1886 - 1980

Stage Producer And Writer Sheldon Cheney

A memorial service will be held in Berkeley tomorrow (Friday) for Sheldon W. Cheney, 94, a renowned authority on the art of the theater, a theatrical producer and a prolific writer for more than half a century.

Mr. Cheney died at Alta Bates Hospital in Berkeley last Friday following a brief illness.

The son of Warren and May Cheney, he was born in the family home which still stands on the University of California campus and currently houses the program for English as a Second Language.

Mr. Cheney was graduated from Berkeley in 1908. In 1916, he founded Theater Arts Magazine in Detroit and then moved to New York where, as a producer, he was associated with Actors' Theater and the Independent Theaters' Clearing House.

He was the author of 14 books. His first major work, "A Primer of Modern Art," appeared in 1924. Other works included "Stage Decoration"(1928), "The Theater — 3000 Years of Drama, Acting and Stagecraft" (1929), New World Architecture (1930), and Sculpture of the World (1968).

Mr. Cheney was married to the former Maude Turner of Berkeley. Following her death in 1934, he married Martha Candler, who died in 1973.

He is survived by a son, John Cheney of Washington, a daughter, Elizabeth Cheney of Los Angeles, four grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

The memorial service will be conducted at 4 p.m. tomorrow at the Women's Faculty Club on the University of California campus in Berkeley.

The family prefers that memorials be sent to the Cheney Award at the Department of Dramatic Arts on the Berkeley campus.

Sheldon Cheney d. 10/10/80

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INTERVIEW HISTORY

Sheldon Cheney came to town, his old home town Berkeley, for a visit in May 1974. Old friends were eager to talk with him; others wanted to meet and get to know him. In Sheldon Cheney was an unusually full store of memories of the town and the University, going back to his mother May Cheney's 44 years as registrar, and his father's literary and business interests in Berkeley.

Really a man not easily catalogued, Sheldon Cheney has published significant work in theater, in architecture, art, and inssculpture. He has pursued an interest in the design afid creation of book plates, enjoyed knowing major figures in the arts, been happy in his marriage, and in general complete in a life that has been a fulfillment of his childhood wishes to be involved with books and writing.

When James D. Hart and J.R.K. Kantor of The Bancroft Library heard that Sheldon Cheney would "be around" they quickly put together a morning, May 24, with Mr. Cheney to which the Regional Oral History Office's tape-recorder was invited. The following transcript is the result of that morning's talk, and of a few hours futther conversation on the following day, May 25th, at the home of the interviewer.

The present volume of information relating to Sheldon Cheney has increased greatly in magnitude as he has settled into Berkeley, a move contemplated in 1974 and made in 1976. He now resides on Panoramic Hill and has been interviewed further by the Department of Dramatic Arts. This interview stands as only a preliminary contribution to the Sheldon Cheney story.

Suzanne B. Riess
Interviewer-Editor

July 1977
Berkeley

INTERVIEW #1 WITH SHELDON CHENEY

Date of Interview: May 24, 1974

Interviewer: ~~Suzanne Riess~~ Jim Kantor and Suzanne Riess

Transcriber: Judith Johnson

[Begin, Side 1]

Cheney: ..Bringing some material for the archive and for Dr. Hart's department; well, I'm interested, and I'm very glad to be doing it. The theatre and the art ~~and the art~~/museum were my particular interests in coming out.

By the way, before I forget, is Dr. Hart in today?

Kantor: Yes, he's here this morning, and I told the secretary that you were here.

Cheney: I found there were some things, which I brought, that I didn't give him the other day. I didn't know whether I was going to see him again. He seemed to like... I brought two little James Joyce items.

Kantor: I'll tell him that you're here and that you'd like to see him.

Cheney: Yes, if he's going to be in, I'd like to have another word with him.

Riess: The contrast you must see on campus must be very exciting.

Cheney: Oh, it's just beyond belief, as much outside the campus as on. You see, I was brought up as a boy here. Did he tell you that my birthplace is in the middle of the campus? As a boy we all had roller

Cheney: coaster. I could start at Piedmont Avenue and Bancroft Way, and we could roll all the way to Telegraph Avenue. It was wonderful. Today I don't think you could do that [laughter].

I see more change, I think, in that little sector around Telegraph Avenue. Of course, they destroyed, didn't they, the first block of shops--all the shops north of Bancroft when I was here. There were a few; it was beginning to run south.

Then I was sorry to hear that the Sather Gate Bookshop had gone out. That was one bookshop. Do you know that this town had more bookshops than (I was going to say) the whole of Pennsylvania, where I live, put together. We had one good bookshop in New Hope, which, I think, is something special, because the town itself is only a thousand people, and it has outlying Solebury township; so that it serves a somewhat larger... But even in Philadelphia--Do you know the old Leary Bookshop in Philadelphia?

Riess: Yes, with the man at the top of the library ladder? That was their logo, wasn't it?

Cheney: On the wrapping paper, even, I believe. Yes, they went out, oh, I guess, a half a dozen years ago. There are a few bookstores in Philadelphia, but they're more likely to carry greeting cards and a little fiction--nothing like the old Leary. When the Leary went out, didn't they find a copy of the Constitution or the Declaration of Independence or something, written in the early days there?

Riess: The big bookstore here, when you were young, would have been Sather Gate and..?

Cheney: There were two or three. The Holmes Book Company was Oakland and Berkeley. I think they had a shop down on Oxford Street--down at Oxford and Addison, or somewhere. I know there was a cousin of mine who worked for them. Also I know, because that's the only place where I heard anybody say that a play that I wrote, which was produced in the Oakland Auditorium, was good. I found somebody who liked the play [laughs]. Iddidn't like it very much.

Kantor: What was the name of the play?

Cheney: Redemption. This was done at the time of--not the exposition at Treasure Island, but the earlier one; it must have been 1915, the date of the Panama Pacific Exposition. These people from Battle Creek--you know, old Dr. Kellogg; he still makes cornflakes, I guess [laughs]--camecameout and they had a stand at the fair. These people came to Sam Hume, who had been a classmate of mine through high school as well as college, and they said, "We'd like to have some public affair,"not celebrating cornflakes, necessarily, but the idea was helped. So Sam said, "What can we do? Where can we get somebody to write this?" Sam finally says, "Here's a man." Sam had done that for Sidney Howard; Maybe that was the year afterward, but Sidney Howard did a pageant to open a theatre outside of Detroit/(I can't remember the name of the place now). It was the same man who backed the Arts and Crafts Theatre in Detroit, where Sam was director. Heehad a country home, and

Cheney: built a Greek Theatre,and this was [illegible] a production. So Sidney Howard wrote the masque, or whatever you would call it.

I did the masque of race betterment. It was produced in the Oakland Auditorium, of all the bad places. I understand they've divided that, haven't hthey, into two theatres now? Anyway, it was this immense place, and as I read now the length of the speeches--that was my first trial at play writing--I am amazed that Sam could get it over [laughs]. I suppose he cut some of the speeches.

Another man I want to ask about is Porter Garnett. Did you know Porter Garnett?

Kantor: I know of him. He has a great Porter Garnett collection here nin the Bancroft.

Cheney: I ran across a very nice letter from him, and I'll send it on with other material. Hereread something I wrote--the first thing I wrote about Gordon Craig--and here I get a letter from this man who had been assistant director on this masqueof mine. Well, I'd known him. He was the chief coach--the man who coached the student plays. You see, we had no student theatre in those days.

Riess: I gather that the English Club was the...

Cheney: There was the English Club, and of course there were class plays. That would be before the Greek Theatre, wouldn't it?

Kantor: The Greek Theatre was 1903.

Cheney: I remember the plays before the Greek Theatre were done in the glade where the Greek Theatre was built. That must have been, then, before

Cheney: 1903. I didn't go to college here until 1904.

Did he tell you that my birthplace is still here on the campus, between--in those days it was between College Avenue and Strawberry Creek; in that block, in the same place as Zeta Psi; we were the second house above Zeta Psi.

Riess: What is the building now?

Cheney: Aid for Forgign Students, or something of that sort. Mrs. McKay [English for Foreign Students] took me over there through the place. It was interesting to see it. You know, they don't build houses that way? You go in there, and the bannisters and everything are as solid as they ever were. Well, it's the same thing about lumber--you ask for a two-by-four these days, and it's a one-and-a-half-by-three or something like that [laughs].

Riess: Did your parents have the house built for them?

Cheney: Yes. I come here and say that I can prove that I'm a real Berkeleyite, because my mother graduated from the University, my father graduated from the University. Then they liked it so muhh that they decided to build just off the campus. In fact, my mother and her mother lived in one room [?], in two or three little cottages that were built along the edge of Strawberry Creek. One was up where Senior Hall is now, one was down about Dana Street, and I think there was one down near Oxford Street. They were rented out by the University, and they lived there, apparently, about the time she came to college or was

Cheney: preparing for college. My father had graduated five years before, in 1878; he was an early graduate. I think I'm an early graduate--I counted it up this morning, and it's been sixty-six years since I graduated. And my father was considerably before that.

My youngsters and my brothers went to college here. Two of my youngsters got their library degrees here; well, I guess they got their bachelor degrees, too. So we really belong.

Then I go over here and I get a hotel room, and the nearest building is Cheney Hall [laughs]. That was named for my mother.

Riess: It sounds like everything is coming together in a wonderful way.

Cheney: Well, I certainly feel that when we come. Oh, I've been treated royally.

Kantor: You mentioned the other day the Mrs. Lee lived next door, and that one summer Cornelia Stratton stayed there. I found her comment about you. I asked her if she'd known you, and she wrote, "Did I know Sheldon Cheney? I lived with my grandmother, Lee in Berkeley while my parents were in Europe. She lived right next door to Cheney's. I was the only girl allowed in "our gang"--about eight. I once wore overalls, dashed wildly over hill and dale, and drove my grandmother frantic talking about 'me and the other boys.' Pennoyers and another male (name escapes me, who years later became head of Harvard Library)..." That's who you said was Robert Blake.

Cheney: Robert Blake and a boy named Larry Lair [?] Hill. I walked up Piedmont to

Cheney: see where Lair's house was, and it's a fraternity now, of course--new brick building and entirely changed.

My connection there might interest you. Are you a tennis player? Everybody else is in Berkeley.

Riess: Let's say yes [laughs].

Cheney: I knew this boy very well. His parents one summer took the job of house sitting the Anna Head School. The school wasn't run in the summer, of course; I suppose Miss Head was away at that time. The Anna Head School had one of the few tennis courts in town, so we boys naturally congregated down there. We were all tennis fans in a small way. But the point is that the girl who came to play with us was Hazel Hotchkiss, who later became Mrs. Wightman, and who went on to win the national title and Wimbledon, and everything. I've been intending to write Hazel Hotchkiss and tell her that I'm still and around and she's still around--you know, that's quite a while ago.

Riess: Challenge her to a game [laughs].

Cheney: She went through high school, and I haven't found out hyet whether she came up to the University.

Kantor: Yes, I think she graduated in 1909.

Cheney: Then she was one year later than mine; mine was in 1908. That's like Sam Hume--Sam Hume was in high school with me, but he somewhere lost a year, apparently, because I think he got his degree in 1909.

Cheney: This has nothing to do with this subject, but do you remember Brick Morse?

Kantor: Oh, yes, I know the name.

Cheney: Brick Morse was one of those people who failed to get his degree several years running [laughs]. He finally accumulated all the necessary units and came up to his graduation. In those days the president handed the diplomas to the students. So Brick Morse comes up, and the president hands him this. Brick Morse's one comment was, "Educated, by gum." [Laughter] We always remembered Brick Morse. He had something to do with the University later, didnt he?

Kantor: Yes, he wrote several of the songs. I don't exactly know what he did later on.

Cheney: I lost track of him. I went East in 1916. I planned my Theatre Arts magazine, which I founded in 1916, here in Berkeley; I made up the first dummy. I still have that first dummy. I'll send it on with the Theatre Arts correspondence in time.

The reason I didn't publish... I had published a little magazine here while I was in college. I had been editor pf the Olla Podrida, the Berkeley High School paper. Then when I came to college I did a little for the Occident and the Californian, but somehow I got the idea of publishing my own magazine. I was interested in book collecting--I was going to be a rare book collector, but not making my million, why,, that kind of faded out.

Cheney: But I published this little magazine. What I did was to get out the first number --it was called a quarterly-- and then wait until I'd sold enough copies of that, and then I'd get out a second issue. I think I put out three years of that. It's probably in the University library. As a matter of fact, I saw to it that the California Bookplat Society had it's home (supposedly) at the University; so I thought if they accumulated a collection of bookplates and a collection of books that were made at the University. But I understand that it was dropped later by hthe University.

Kantor: There is a collection of bookplates in the archives that Mr. Rowell kept up, but that stopped a long time ago. What was the name of your quarterly?

Cheney: The Bookplate Booklet. The first issue that we got out said California Bookplates, and then the rest of the issues were called the Bookplate Booklet. What started me on that was that that was what I was going to do with Theatre Arts magazine. I had written one book about the theatre and new movement in the theatre, which was practically a student work; and yet, some publisher in New York now has (I suppose I let the copyright run out) reprinted it. Every bookbooI ever wrote is in print today. You know these pirating--it isn't really piracy. When I let the copyright run out they had the right to it, but I guess half or more of my books the original publishers are publishing. The rest are done by the reprint

Cheney: houses and generally without my knowledge. I find out afterwards.

Anyway, I was going to start Theatre Arts magazine the same way. I remember very well that one day I was walking down Shattuck Avenue. I didn't even know Sam Hume was in town, and I met him. He said, "What are you doing?"

I said, "I'm just thinking of starting a theatre magazine."

He asked, "What are you going to call it?"

I said, "Theatre Arts."

He said, "That's a good name," You know, nobody had every thought of puting the name art with theatre, because we had a drama department; we had scenic studies; we want and got our scenery somewhere else; or we had special places where you would go for acting. Nobody had ever thought of putting the two words "theatre arts" together; so this was a good name. And it has persisted as Theatre Arts Department in a quite a number of universities, partly because my old partner, Kenneth McGowan, ended his days in Hollywood and Los Angeles, and he organized the UCLA theatre department. So naturally he'd been on Theatre Arts; he followed me as editor of Theatre Arts. So he named it Theater Arts Department. And Santa Barbara, also. This University is still way back in the Dark Ages, with its Dramatic Department [laughs]. I shouldn't say that, because, as I say, I was at [Travis] Bogard's house last night.

Riess: How about the printing--did you do all the aspects of your first quarterly?

Cheney: I didn't... It was printed here in Berkeley. But I think the first issues was printed at the Gazette. I had published Olla Podrida, the high school paper, so I was known there. They probably gave me credit.

There was a man named Orozco [?] in South Berkeley, down where we used to call Loren--do they still have that name? South Berkeley, Alcatraz Avenue--Loren Station was the south Berkeley station. This man Orozco was quite a whiz, and the later issues of Bookplate Booklet were very good.

I met Sam Hume on this occasion, and Sam had just gotten back from either Harvard or from his study with Gordon Craig. I think he'd been East for this pageant that he'dand Sidney Howard did (I didn't know Sidney Howard well; he was some years later in college than I). Sam says, "I've got the job, and now I'm going to direct the Arts and Drafts Theater in Detroit. I've got a board of millionaires there who are very receptive." He said, "Have you got any money?"

I said, "No, I have no money, but I'm going to publish it on this basis, of one issue at a time until I get started."

He said, "I'll get you a subsidy." [Laughs] So Sam goes back East to his Detroit people, and says, "Look, we haved a chance to do this, which will probably be an international progressive theater magazine."

So, pretty soon I get a letter from Sam that says, "I can get you a $600 subsidy." Well, that was a fortune in those days.

Did I tell you this? When I came out of college I was trying

Cheney: to get started as a writer. I looked around, and I thought, "Here's these college people; now, I could be a teacher." In fact, my mother was crazy for me to take a teachers certificate. She was the placement secretary at the University. She wanted each one of us boys to get a teacher's certificate. I had three brothers, and as each one came along, if we'd only get a teacher's certificate we'd be safe [laughs].

Anyway, Iddidn't want the teacher's certificate, but trying to make a living I saw a $600 subsidy... Looking around at the faculty, the youngest people on the faculty--the instructors--got $150 a month, $1800 a year. I said to myself, "Now, if I can make that much out of writing or publishing..." I guess it was too small to measure [laughs], but I went East with this subsidy. I was allowed to draw $150 a month on the account. Then I was thrown out of Detroit--my magazine.

Riess: How so, thrown out?

Cheney: I was a pacifist. This was war time. The war came on in 1917; I started Theater Arts magazine in 1916. The war was already on, wasn't it? Anyway, I was against the people who didn't want German opera, threw out the Wagner, I guess, at the Metropolitan. I wrote a little article in the fourth issue of my magazine which said that even though we don't like the Germans variously, since we're at war with them, and their politics, and so on, nevertheless they build the best theater buildings in the world today; and I published a little picture. One of my six men who put up a hundred dollars each blew up. He says, "This is treason!"

Cheney: So the board withdrew the subsidy there. They were going to subsidize the second year. The head of the group, though--that was George Booth, the man who owned the Detroit News, one of the most profitable papers in the country, probably; and he had married a Miss Scripps, and that was part of the Scripps-Howard chain. Booth was a little bit liberal, and he had been criticized for something that he had published nin his Detroit News. So I go around and see this head of my sponsors' committee, and he said, "Well, Cheney, things like this happen, and you just can't buck it. You'll be better offinin New York anyway." And he actually arranged that I get $150 to cover the move to New York with the magazine. So that's the reason the magazine didn't start in Berkeley.

Riess: That's a very interesting story of Eastward, Ho, rather than Westward, Ho.

Cheney: That's Douglas's new title for his new book, isn't it?

Kantor: That's right--Justice Douglas.

Cheney: Go East Young Man. I just bought that. Of course, my whole career has been theater as revolutionary or liberal [laughs].

Kantor: Did you have some reason to go to New York? Was there somebody there who...?

Cheney: Well, it would be the center for the modern theater movement, of course, because there were more groups in New York and around New York. Also, I did have a publisher there, Alfred Knopf. Alfred Knopf is the best publisher in the country, still, I think. I don't say that because he published a couple of my books, but [laughs] he gave me office space in his office. It happened to be 220 West 42nd Street

Cheney; practically in Times Square.

Of course, I started the magazine, and wrote my first book, in protest against the commercial theater--attacking, especially, David Belasco.

By the way, here's something you can tell me. We couldn't remember the name last night. From this campus Eleanor Gates [Yates?] went East; she wrote "Poor Little Rich Girl," which was a great success in New York. What was the name of her husband, hwho wrote "The Bird of Paradise;"" which Belasco put on?

Kantor: I think I can tell you from my catalogue. When we go downstairs, because she is always called "Miss Tully"--Richard Watson Tully.

Cheney: Right; that's it. Dick Tully.

Kantor: It said "Mrs. Eleanor Gates (Tully)."

Cheney: We couldn't think of that last night, and Jane Bogard she'd telephone somebody she knew who was a friend of Eleanor Gates [?]

I haven't heard from her yet.

Riess: So Knopf knew that you were coming with this enterprise, and the way was all smooth?

Cheney: Well, I think Alfred Knopf had the idea that if it prospered, then he would become publisher of the magazine. As a matter of fact, it didn't prosper. And, as a matter of fact, I eventually went--not into war work; in those days they didn't call up people who had families, and I had a wife and three children. Poor wife and three children. My wife said to

Cheney: me, after we had been married and moved down to New York, "Well, we've moved" (I think it was) "seven times since we've been married." [Laughs] But I'd get a $150 salary and I'd leave my family in Berkeley, where they were at that time; but they moved up to Dutch Flat as a matter of economy, because we had had a camp at one time up there. So the first six months I'm in Detroit, we divide this $150, and I send them half and I live on the other half in Detroit.

I'm glad I remembered Dick Tully. I'll tell you something I else about him. I get down to very trivial things, but Eleanor Gates and Dick Tully were the first two people ever to be seen holding hands on the campus. You know, in the old days you didn't show your affection, and you didn't walk around holding hands. But Dick Tully and Eleanor Gates were known to have been seen in the center of the campus actually holding hands.

She made a great success, and then never had another successful play. I knew her--not here, but later in New York, in her later life; she was a member of the Town Hall Club that I belonged to, so I saw a good deal of her for a time. I have a few letters, which I will send on to you.

I never really knew Dick Tully well. I think Belasco did two plays of Dick Tully's--"Bird of Paradise and some other play. But he didn't have the talent that Eleanor Gates had. That is, his plays were melodramatic, really, and sensational. Well, that's the reason he went to Belasco, I suppose, because he'd get this wonderful

Cheney: production. Isn't "Bird of Paradise" the one where the girl throws herself into the volcano in Hawaii? That was the kind of thing he wrote.

Her play, still to this day, I think is one of the best things in the files of American plays.

Kantor: Then you say you went into war work?

Cheney: I was in War Camp Community Service work for a time.

Kantor: In New York City?

Cheney: Yes. Our office was the American Recreation Association--is that the big recreation outfit? Anyway, it was under them. They set up this war camp community service. Oh, a Berkeley boy was in there, which was the reason I got drawn in, because he had been the head of the cadet corps here. I can't think of his name now. He went East and became a social worker. He not only was head of the corps when he was in college, but later he came back for a couple of years and directed the military.... You'll run across his name somewhere. I know for one reason, because he worked for my father in the real estate office.

My father was a writer, and wanted to be a writer all his life after getting out of college. That was due to Edward Rwoland Sill. Do you know that Sill was once in the English Department here? You wouldn't believe this, but last year I got a check for $33--royalties for a new edition of Sill's poems. Well, I kind of scratched my

Cheney: head: how in the world do I rate getting money from Edward Rowland Sill? It was because Millicent Shinn (somebody in your department here or one of the departments/did a theses...)

Kantor: Lance [?] Kelly did a dissertation on this.

Cheney: This is typical of the way I run my business. I got a letter from this person, saying he was doing a thesis on the Shinns, or on Millicent Shinn. She was a wonderful woman, as a matter of fact--scared us boys to death [laughs].

Anyhow, I got this letter, and I haven't got anything on the Shinns, so I never answered. Then years later I send down to you a letter that I got from Millicent Shinn. All it's about is that she said: Will Warren or Sheldon come down with the car (we were just beginning to have cars in those days) and pick up the cat [Laughter]. She must have given us a cat.

Millicent Shinn was the first of her kind, I think. She did a thesis on, I think, child study.

Kantor: It was the first dissertation by a woman for a PhD, I think--1898.

Cheney: It was, apparently, the first book written on child psychology by somebody who had observed a child--it was her little niece, I guess--Charlie Shinn's little daughter. It became known all over the world. The German psychologists thought it was really something new.

I worked for Charlie Shinn later. I have some letters from Charlie Shinn; I'll send you on those. He was an editor also of Overland Monthly. My

Cheney: father at one time--I don't know if he was actually the editor of it, but he worked with Millicent Shinn and Charlie Shinn as an editor. But father fell heir somehow, or bought... It sounds unlikely, in our family, but he bought a magazine--the old Californian, as it was called. Then they combined, I think, the two magazines--Overland and Californian. That was before the days of Sunset, of course.

I worked for Charlie Shinn after he retired from literary life and became head of the Sierra Forest. So three of us students went up the summer after the earthquake, I guess it was, and acted as forest guards. I'll show you something.

I went down yesterday to the College of Arts and Crafts, because I was in on the beginning of the College of Arts and Crafts. I was in on the beginning, and in this way I wasn't a founder. But old Mr. Meyer [Frederick] was an artis and teacher. I think he had been teaching at the Mark Hopkins Institute, which was then an affiliate college. Students would go over there/to the night classes. Of course, you couldn't have a nude model on the campus; you couldn't have the kind of classes you could get there. So a lot of us used to go over to evening classes.

Cheney: So comes the earthquake and wipes out Mark Hopkins. A few of us get the idea that we ought to have an art school in Berkeley, doing the things that they won't let us do on the campus. So we finally get Mr. Meyer to come over. The reason I was in on it... I went over there yesterday, and they said, "You weren't in on the beginning. Your name doesn't appear as a student until 1909."

I said, "I certainly was there. Oh, I didn't pay any tuition; maybe that's the reason." So, because I didn't pay any tuition, my name wasn't on the first class. The reason I didn't pay tuition was that working up here with the students in New York [the Arc?], I said, "Well, here, those of you who are interested in art and want to go to a life class, a sketch class, we're going to have an art school right here in Berkeley." So I could steer them down there; so I got free tuition. Between that and giving them a free ad on the back of my Bookplate Booklet...

What I was going to show you: I took these down to the Arts and Crafts College yesterday. I go to these places at eleven o'clock in the morning, and stay generally till three or four o'clock in the afternoon before we get through. The first thing they bring out is a book of mine. My nephew--my great-nephew--is a born photographer, and he went through the Arts and Crafts College with photography as his subject. He comes along and brings a camera, and I never was so photographed in my life; he must have taken fifty

Cheney: pictures--before the gates, signing my own book in the library [laughs], us at lunch, and different members of the family standing before the portrait of Mr. Meyer.

I took this book of mine and looked inside to see what kind of bookplate they have in a place like that. Nothing but a rubber stamp--a rubber stamp which says, "California College of Arts and Crafts." Here's a college of artists. Here I am--I never became an artist, but at that time I would... [tape scrapes intellibly]

Riess: ... How fine they are.

Cheney: Wait a minute. Maybe somebody stole out the one... Oh, I lost the one of the Peace Cabin, which was the place of Charlie Shinn. You see
xxxx, I kept busy. You know the Stevenson monument?

Kantor: Oh, yes.

Cheney: One of the points I was making down here at this art school was that, in the first place, why don't you, if the faculty won't make do it, why doesn't somebody make a proper bookplate? Even the Department of Dramatic Art, I notice, uses a rubber stamp which says, "Departmmmt of Dramatic Art." I was, as I said,aa special bookplate [?]. I taught myself here etching and woodcutting--this is a woodcut [Shows bookplate], and this is a woodcut. These are etchings. I bought myself an etching press, because there was no place here on the campus, certainly. Thre was no etching press, and there was no school at that time.

Kantor: There were no classes, certainly..

Cheney: Oh, here's Peace Cabin; that's Charles and Julia Shinn [Shows picture]. That's what started my showing you these. I didn't bring these over to show to you.

Kantor: That's something I hadn't known about you doing.

Cheney: Well, I made my first money out of making bookplates and not out of writing, as a matter of fact. I actually got up where for one of them I got $35, for doing that that plate..

[Showing plates] Of course, this was a gift.

Riess: Who was Kit?

Cheney: Kit was my sister-in-law.

Kantor: That's a lovely plate.

Cheney: That was one of my first trials at etching.

That's mine, of course, before those bridges...they spoiled my Golden Gate.

Riess: Sure, there's Yerba Buena.

Cheney: This is very symbolic, you see. This is a view out from the hillside, and the tree is an oak tree. The name Cheney comes from the Chêne in French, so I used the oak tree as a symbol of my private press. Also I had a little press mark with the oak tree.

I don't know whether you're interested in these things, and I'm taking a lot of your time, but I did bring these things, because I didn't know whether I would see Mr. Hart. This is the only thing I brought out that I'm not giving [laughter]. There's something [else] I want to give him and ask him if he wants it. That is my

Cheney: sister-in-law, who is still living (my wife died last November, and this is her sister). She was a specialist in the South. This I discovered among Martha's effects. Her sister had sent it to her at some time. It's the story of a Negro commune. It was started in the mountains. I didn't know if maybe the Black Studies Department... maybe Mr. Hart's department might distribute it around to somebody who might be interested.

Here's what I said I wouldn't give anybody, because it's my wif'es copy.

Kantor: "An excursion into one of our humbler Philistinisms, by Sheldon Cheney."

Cheney: I had a private press. This press weighed, I think, seventeen hundred pounds--one of those old presses that you press down on. And by hand--Oh, I set the type and everything, of course. I did another pamphlet, called "The Modern Art in the Theater." I'll try to dig you up the pieces of that. But this was more of a novelty.

Kantor: Where is Scarborough?

Cheney: On the Hudson, just above Tarrytown, in [?] County. I forget which county now. I bought this seventeen hundred pound press. Of course, my family had to be used to queer ways already, but they were scandalized because I didn't have any place to put the press. The only room I could put it in was the parlor--the living room. So, in this old house that we made over up there, I set up my private press in the living room. I had to go down in the cellar and bolster up with extra beams to hold the weight of this press.

Cheney: But I only got out two pamphlets. Then I sold the press some years later, and it came...was it the Troutback Press [?]. That was the first thing, I think, I sent to Mr. Hart--a publication which they'd sent me, which was...which one of the Black poets? Only a hundred copies, or something of that sort.

Kantor: Langston Hughes?

Cheney: No, that wasn't the first thing I sent you, the Gertrude Stein.

Kantor: You sent a Langston Hughes, I think, and Gertrude Stein plates, yes.

Cheney: And then mostly Ezra Pound material. I still haven't sent down the Isadora Duncan. I have fifty letters from Gordon Craig, for instance, who was, of course, Isadora's first...

Riess: That's so interesting. That's why I know your name--because I was interviewing the Quitzows at the Temple of the Wings. That's the Boynton Dance...

Cheney: Who has it, Al White? [?]

Riess: I was interviewing them, and I was looking at your book, because they're very fond of Isadora Duncan.

Cheney: Oh, the Isadora essays.

Riess: That's right. Isadora and Florence Treadwell Boynton--did you know Florence Boynton? who built that place?

Cheney I've been apologizing every time anybody asks me that, because I came back in hthe thirties. That was after I had done the Isadora book. I'm no speaker. I certainly wasn't any speaker in my early days. I braced up and made two transcontinental lecture tours that

Cheney: are not supposed to be known about [laughs]. But we got back here to Berkeley, and one day Mrs. Boynton asks us to come out to these things held out on the lawn.

Riess: At homes?

Cheney: Yes. So we expected to see some Greek dancing, and we met a lot of nice people. Suddenly Mrs. Boynton stopped the proceedings and said, "I hope Mr. Cheney will tell us something about his association with Isadora." [Laughs]. Well, I just couldn't imagine, and all I could do was get up and say that I just didn't think it was appropriate. Here we were waiting to see the dances, and why should I get up there--I didn't say "why should I," but Itdid refuse to speak. I thought that perhaps it was mean, because I had known Isadora. You see, I worked with Isadora's brother for years, and...

[End of side 1]

[Begin side 2]

Cheney: I took this booklet, as a matter of fact. What I wanted to do, of course, was make the United States have better postage stamps. If you read it, you'd see that I say that I'd been encouraged because under the old administration a letter had been mailed to me and it had a date--March 5th, say,--one year, and the next year they delivered it to me in Scarborough. That was the very day the new administration went into effect. I guess it was Harding; I forget the date.

Cheney. Anyway, there was no way you could get a thing of that kind before. I had written a letter to the postmaster general, saying I had a hundred stamps I'd picked up from all over the world that I thought were the best examples, and I'd like to send them down, hoping that our stamps would be better designed after that. I got a letter from the acting third assistant postmaster general, saying that my letter had been put on file [laughs].

That is typical. The same thing happened on this campus regarding theater and building an art museum. I agitated for fifty years here, I'm sure.

Kantor: You said that you had worked with Julia Morgan.

Cheney: I didn't work directly with her. She was quite a friend of my mother's.

To finish this about this stamp business: Then comes along Roosevelt--FDR--and he was a stamp collector. So the next time I go down to Washington after he goes in, I go trotting down to the door of the White House, and hand in a copy for him. I didn't get a letter from him directly, but from (what was his name?) Miss Hand?) his famous secretery. She said, "The President is delighted with this," and that's all I ever got.

But he did design one stamp; I think he designed that first very good--perhaps only a doodle, but he made the eagle for the first airmail stamp. The stamps are better, but... I suggested that they get a committee of artists to oversee and help them decide what artists to get. Only, what they did was to go and

Cheney: get a collection of commercial artists, instead of a collection of real artists.

Riess: Yes, it shows.

Cheney: And, so, sometimes we get a good stamp. A man in our community, there, just outside of New Hope, who did the Sidney Lanier portrait, I think was very good. He did some of the bicentennial (is it?)--the recent ones of New England scenes and so on.

We get some good stamps. The /Robert Frostiisn't quite as [?]

Kantor: The Jefferson stamp was relatively [?]

Cheney: Yes. Robert Frost--I take pleasure in going into the post office now and saying to the boys in the post office, "Can you sell me some stamps?" And, "Oh, I knew that man." Two of them now--I knew Frank Lloyd Wright very well, and he's on the two-cent stamp, which was used when we had the eight-cent stamp, and we all had the eights left over. I got a lot of Frank Lloyd Wright stamps then.

Then I knew, in a small way, Robert Frost, and he's on the stamps now.

Riess: The Frank Lloyd Wright stamp was a difficult stamp, because the Guggenheim looked a lot like a cancellation.

Cheney: Absolutely it wasn't done by a man who understood, because he should have foreseen that--that it looks as if it had been cancelled. I suppose the clerks take that into consideration [chuckles].

Kantor: You said the other day that Wright had come out here to speak before the Berkeley Forum, and that you pointed out the campus to him. What was that remark he made?

Cheney: [Laughs] Well, I'll tell it; is that machine on? Oh, it's a funny story. I shouldn't get down to the trivial, but this was rather interesting. I wrote a book called The New World Architecture. That's the reason that yesterday afternoon I had a long session with some of the architecture students. I wrote this book because there was no good large introduction to modern architecture in English; and partly because Frank Lloyd Wright had never been represented in any book published in English, so far as I know, up to that time. The American Institute of Architects published, just a year before that, a book about great living American architects (it wasn't called that), and Wright's name wasn't even in the book.

There's three books in German already, on Wright's architecture. So I said to myself that I was going to see that Wright gets in. So that was my first connection with Frank Lloyd Wright.

Riess: When was that?

Cheney: The book came out in 1930; so that must have been in the late '20s, because I had known him in the East. One time he wanted me to go down to his school and become dean of students. I couldn't do that if I was going to continue to write, of course.

Riess: Was that in Cranbrook?

Cheney: No, Cranbrook was the place where I couldn't think of, where Booth's pageant--and Sidney Howard and Sam Hume had put on the pageant.

No, Taliesin.

Kantor: In Arizona?

Cheney: No, I never went to the West; I went to Taliesin in Wisconsin, which was his original home.

So I put in, oh, perhaps twenty of Wright's pictures, and he'd never been so well represented. So he felt quite grateful. I have one book I'll send you, which Wright gave me, and said, "To Sheldon, with appreciation and gratitude. Frank." I don't know whether that ought to be over in the architectural library...

Kantor: It should be in the rare book collection; you don't want it on an open shelf.

Cheney: Anyway, you'll get it in time. After a while, Wright had a terrible period of not having any jobs, and he was really pretty nearly broke. So he goes out lecturing. And you wouldn't believe it, but he was lecturing and getting in some places only $75 a lecture. I don't know how he lived on it.

Anyway, here he is, down in Pasadena, and the Forum in Berkeley announces a lecture by Wright. Wright, knowing me, and knowing that I probably had something to do with getting a job for him to lecture, telegraphs me from Pasadena and says, "I'll be up in Berkeley tomorrow morning. Notify the Forum, please." [Laughs] So I notify the Forum.

Then, I get in a terrible, battered old car I had--I bought it for $250 in New York to transport my family from New York to Berkeley--and I go down to the Berkeley station at, oh, ten o'clock in the morning; I tried to figure when the train from Los Angeles would be in. I wait and wait and wait, and no arrival. Then I begin to

Cheney: think maybe he got off at Dwight Way, or maybe he got off at South Berkeley; I'll just collar the railroad down. Sure enough, half way between Center Street and Dwight Way, here I see Wright walking along the sidewalk, and he's picked up a Negro boy to carry his suitcase [laughter].

I pick him up in the old car--he pays off his boy--and I take him up to the house. What his remark was... I said,"Well, now, you're not going to like the University architecture." [Laughs] We stepped out onto... I was taking him to see Maybeck's work; I knew he would like some of Maybeck's things. So we step out of the College Avenue house up here, and all the view we got of the University at that time was the Campanile. I said, "That's all the buildings you're going to see, really." And he said, "Well, that's a pencil." [Laughter] That was his only comment on the University architecture.

Then we went up to Maybeck's. Did I tell you I started something called the School for Openmindedness across College Avenue from the campus? Well, I had started a School for Openmindedness there, and had a few classes. This was when I was going to make a million and establish my theater and school and press and some sort of institute for mystic studies, and so on, in Berkeley. I was going to have it, as a matter of fact, up in Woolsey Canyon, which was not occupied when I was [?]

Kantor: Where's Woolsey Canyon?

Cheney: It's where the cyclotron is now.

Kantor: You called it Woolsey Canyon?

That was called Woolsey Canyon in those days. It wasn't in the campus then.

I thought, "Well, I'm going to set this up right next totthe campus." Anyway, the school didn't last, but two of my pupils at the school, a man a woman, who were interested in modern... I had one class on modern theater--theater since 1910, or something of that sort--and one class on modern art; I'd written some books on modern art already. I forget what the other two classes were; maybe there was one on architecture. Anyway, these two people owned a Maybeck house. I telephoned them first, and told them that I had Mr. Wright here and could he see their house? [They said] Oh, sure. So we go into this little house--beautiful little house. I don't know whether it burned in the fire or not. Wright stepped in, and I thought he was very much pleased with the architecture. He seemed to think, well, the whole thing is of a piece and there's something original. Then he pointed down and said, "How did that get in here?" It was an imitation tile rug for the kitchen. He spotted it immediately; there was something that was imitation, not something thatMaybeck would do. These people confessed they had brought it from their old house.

Kantor: This was back before the Berkeley fire that this was all taking place--when Wright came out?

Cheney: I was trying to remember. I can't remember the date of that. Then, you know, Mr. Hart told me that the next time Wright lectured in Berkeley, he introduced him. Oh, I had to introduce Wright. Do you go on the stage and lecture, ever?

Riess: No, I wouldn't think of it.

Cheney: [Laughs] Now, I was scared to death to get onto a stage when I was young. The University gave me my first lecture, though--the Extension department, I think it was. They put me on with--who was the... Father somebody, from over at the College in Moraga, is it?

Kantor: St. Mary's College?

Cheney: Yes, St. Mary's. Anyway, there was a Father over there who was a [elocutioner?] born elecutor. He was the best known speaker around, and they put me on a program with him at a teachers' convention, I think it was. Well, here I get up and have no voice training, and probably shouted and whatnot. I had good material; in fact, this gentleman who did this polished speech said afterwards, "Anyone could get something out of that talk." I'd just been in Russia, and had been studying the Russian theaters.

Anyway, what I was going to tell you, because Wright's involved: I went around and got into various places where I had occasionally had to get up and talk, and always my legs shaking or... I couldn't really do it. I finally said, "They've done everything else to me; they can't do much more when I do get up there [laughs]." And I

Cheney: actually conquored that. I made two transcontinental lecture trips, from New York to Berkeley. It can be done.

[End of interview]

INTERVIEW #2 with SHELDON CHENEY

Date of Interview: May 25, 1974

Interviewer: Suzanne Riess

Transcriber: Judy Johnson

[Begin, side 1]

Cheney: [Talking about Mechanics Institute Library & fire]..At about that time, and I met him on the campus one day. I said I had a book out of his library at the time of the fire; it was a very nice book and I would bring it back if they were starting over. He said, "Oh, the insurance companies paid up, and we couldn't know what to do with it." It has very interesting copper plate illustrations in it. So I gained by the fire that much [laughs].

As a matter of fact, I was in the cadet corps that went over to the fire. Did I tell you that the other day?

Riess: No. Were you probably were a sophomore or junior in college?

Cheney: I would have been a sophomore or junior. Anyway, because my father was in the real estate business, of course we always had a horse and buggy--a horse and what to you call them? My father went away for a month, I guess up to this redwood place we were talking about.

Riess: Mendocino.

Cheney: While he was gone, my brother said we would change over the barn into a garage. So he changed the barn over into a garage, and we had cars

Cheney: from that time on.

When the fire came, of course, we here in Berkeley could see this column of smoke, and understood it was very serious--that the city was burning. So my brother got the idea--that was the year after he had graduated, 1905--that maybe the cadets could be helpful as joined to the military over there, to prevent looting, supposedly, and that sort of thing--patrol the streets.

So he gets in the car, and somehow the Key Route--no, the Key Route didn't carry cars. I don't know, but one of the ferries was running--either Oakland Mole or the other one--to North Beach. They couldn't come in--I think it was the Ferry Building-- by the regular route that late in the day.

But he went over and offered the services of the cadets.

Riess: A car full of you.

Cheney: He came back and got as many of the cadets--he wasn't the head of the cadets, but simply one company. Prentice Gray--no, Prentice Grey was head of the company I was in. Anyway, whoever it was said, "Oh, yes, we'd all like to go." I remember my mother objecting. She thought my older brother, who was a captain, was a military type; but I was a pacifist and so on--anything but military [laughs]. I never carried a gun with real bullets. That was the first time I think any of us had ammunition with our guns.

Riess: You were controlling looting and things like that?

Cheney: That was what we were supposed to do, primarily. But when we got over, I remember Prentice Grey, our captain... We started over about six or seven o'clock in the evening, and then had to march all the way, because the city was burning, around to the North Beach, and then come in above the fire. I remember Prentice Grey taking me out and showing me what there was to do. He said, "There's a man up on the steps of a house. We'll go up and see what he's doing there." So he simply asked him, "Do you live here?" The mand said no, he was looking for a friend. [Grey] said, "Well, you get out." And that was what we were supposed to do.

Carrying these big rifles and cartridge belts--I guess we didn't have cartridge belts... One of my classmates in the cadets shot himself through the foot, because he wasn't used to having a rifle [laughs].

Riess: Were you uniformed?

Cheney: We were in uniform. We stayed three or four days, during the whole time until the fire was controlled.

Riess: Did you stay in the camps...?

Cheney: No, they commandeered a certain number of private houses out toward Van Ness Avenue. The fire got as far as Van Ness, didn't it?

Riess: Yes.

Cheney: But it was quite an experience. That three days I saw many things--that procession of people, refugees, absolutely endless. Where they all came from...? Every kind of vehicle in the world--very few cars,

Cheney: but any wagon and horse that they could get; they piled their belongings into them and carried them away and, I suppose, headed for South San Francisco or down the peninsula.

Then when we got back after three days over there, we came back to Berkeley. Of course, a great number of refugees had been ferried over.

Riess: Did people think that there might be more earthquakes? In other words, they didn't feel safe about anything?

Cheney: Well, that was true to a certain extent. But, of course, I remember they had free soup kitchens, and that sort of thing, on the campus. I remember old Jacques Loeb--was that the name of the famous scientist who was the most famous man on the campus in those days, the Einstein of his day, I suppose--was at the head of a committee that was feeding these refugees. It was told that he put so much of some kind of medicine in the soup [laughs] to make sure it was sanitary, that it spoiled the whole thing. [Laughter]

Every place in Berkeley there were camps.andI remember that Harmon Gym, I think, was used as a big dormitory. Of course, that wasn't the present Harmon Gym; that was the old wooden Harmon Gym, where the University meetings were held and all the big events on the campus.

Riess: I've never been in a disaster. Have you? Have you ever experienced a major disaster?

Cheney: Well, no. You know the Delaware River in New Hope?

Riess: Yes, I remember some floods there.

Cheney: In '55 we were living, fortunately,oon high ground, so we weren't... As a matter of fact, do you remember Lambertville, a little town across from New Hope? I and my wife were shopping in Lambertville, in the afternoon. We knew the river was high, but we fortunately were the last vehicle to cross the bridge before the water came up [out?]

This is something that library people are always interested in--that ~~this~~ we kept seeing this flood come, and the library (New Hope Solebury Library, called for the township, as well as for New Hope)... It was a very nice library; it was in a building that was originally the barn of this house...

Riess: The Perry mansion.

Cheney: Yes, the Perry mansion barn. The river rises, and half a dozen citizens come and cart away every book up onto high ground, and saved the library. But nobody thinks to get the card catalogue, and the card catalogue is inundated [laughs]. Well, of course, it was such a mess that they couldn't use a card out of it, and they had to start from scratch and build their entire... And that's quite a thing a museum. That's one thing I feel about sending books out here. If you send books that they already have, or books that they don't need, the cost of accessioning--making the card catalogue and getting the registry and everything--is so great a part of library

Cheney: costs.

Riess: It's terrible to contemplate all of that.

Cheney: Well, that was a special case, of course. We did see that blood, but we were high enough so that we didn't have to worry.

Riess: I wondered if you then kind of lived on the edge of the volcano, so to speak, if you go back to San Francisco. Is that living with danger?

Cheney: No, I don't think so. You see, the earthquake was past that morning; it came at five o'clock or so in the morning. I was more in danger where I was sleeping, because I was sleeping with some of my brothers, probably, on a porch. Over us were two tanks on a tank house. My mother comes running to the window, and says, "Stay still. Stay still." When the earthquake gets her out of bed, she feels it immediately, and says, "Stay still." Well, the one place we were in danger was under these tanks, because if these two tanks had crumbled down, it would have been a disaster.

Riess: Actually, you and your father had all that experience with real estate in Berkeley, and it's probably always been a question. People for years have wondered if it was safe to live around here. Do you remember thinking, for instance, that some districts of Berkeley were [safer than others]?

Cheney: Oh, we didn't have any fear at all, because there'd never been an earthquake in modern times, until the 1906 one. And then Berkeley was so little hit. I remember looking from our house across to a

Cheney: little cottage about a hundred yards away. A square of brick at the top of the chimney had simply turned around half way. There was no damage. The only thing that I remember that was damaged was the high school. And, you know, that's like this Stanford campus--a building built with public funds, the contractor always gets away with something. One corner of the roof of the high school caved in. But I don't remember any other damage in Berkeley from the earthquake. We never felt there was any... We didn't know about these faults.

We didn't know about these faults. Of course, we knew that there was a fault that ran up the peninsula, under Stanford University and and into San Francisco, but we thought this side of the bay was safe. I never heard of anyone shunning Berkeley because there was a danger.

Riess: But didn't houses get those cracks and do a little slippage?

Cheney: I don't think that... There was one place oup on either Panoramic or Prospect Street, but that came, I think, before the earthquake even; and certainly, afterwards, there was quite a sectionof the hillside there on one of those streets that slipped down and took the roadway out of alignment, and perhaps one or two houses were damaged. But that's the only place I remember it.

somebody told me recently there was a place here on north Berkeley that had danger of slippage; but that was seepage,from some water condition, and not an earthquake, I think.

Riess: When were you doing the real estate? What were you doing?

Cheney: I was in college between 1904 and 1908, and certain summers... One

Cheney: summer I went up and worked as forest guard in the Sierra National Forest. Three of us from the University here went. Other summers I was probably working real estate, or I handled the insurance business for the real estate office, perhaps. Then, when I came out of college/(I ... don't want to make this too personal, but my mother, being in education--being the placement secretary at that time at the University--always had the idea that/if we boys, or anybody that lived in the house, would just get a teaching certificate, why, we'd be safe. I would have been safe, as far as that goes, if I had gone into teaching, because, you know, a writer's job is jup and down, unless you began with money, which we didn't. The system/then, in our family/at least, was that you could live at home until you got your bachelor's degree. Then you made your own living, and presumably went out and got married after a while.

Riess: But you resisted the...

Cheney: I resisted the temptation. My older brother became an architect and city planner, and my younger brother became Dr. Marshall Cheney, of course; he's the one [that's been?] here <u>all</u> these years. He's the man, wasn't he, that went to all the football games and ran out when anybody got hurt.

Riess: I didn't know that.

Cheney: Yes. He died here last year; maybe it was a little over a year ago. My youngest brother--there were four of us--died very young, at age fourteen or fifteen.

Riess: Was your mother working? When did she take that job?

Cheney: She didn't take the job; she created the job [laughs]. That happened in a way... My father, like me and some other of the family, wanted to write. These people were inspired. And this is a part of history that I've never seen. The poet, Edward Rowland Sill came to the University (it must have been) at the end of the '70s--one of the first English professors. He apparently was a wonderful teacher, and he inspired a great number of his students to want to write, at least. He inspired them, more or less. Father was one of those students.

Well, my father wanted to write. He did. They went on their wedding trip, as a matter of fact, on a grand tour of Europe. He did some correspondence for the San Francisco Chronicle. Well, he wanted to write, but his eyes gave out. He was on Overland magazine; at one time he owned the Californian, which is an old magazine. He just then couldn't stand up to the writing life, where you do have to do a certain amount of reading; you have to spend time scribbling. So he went into the real estate business. That's the way that came into the family.

Riess: While he was trying to write, was your mother trying to support the...?

Cheney: When he first was--not an invalid, entirely, at no time... Later he wrote while he was in the real estate business. He got up at five o'clock in the morning to write a certain number of novels. You'll find there are three novels; theyre the property of the library down here.

Cheney: But mother, not knowing what was going to happen--here they had four boys, and somebody had to support the family--went to work and founded a teachers' agency in San Francisco. For quite a number of years she ran this teachers' agency. Then she simply got the idea that teachers shouldn't have to pay the agency. See, it came out of their salaries. The only way my mother could make her living was collecting a percentage on the salary of every teacher she placed. She became known, of course, to every school superintendant in the state, and happened to be a close friend to, with... Well, one of her classmates ran the San Francisco Normal School, for instance. And the other normal schools, like the one that became UCLA.

So she came to the University. One person who lived next door to us was Professor Slate. I don't know what he had to do with administration, as well as being a professor of physics. But she persuaded the University oto open this placement office. There was only one in the country at that time, and that was at Harvard. So this was the second University in the country to have a placement office. At first she'd place the engineers as well as the teachers.

Riess: It makes so much sense. I had thought there were always placement offices [laughs].

Cheney: You educate people, and then you let them go out and get a job--that's the usual way [laughs]. But that's the way the office happened to be organized first. I don't know how many years she

Cheney: was on the campus. I know she was fifteen years at least in placing teachers [?]; but how many years she'd already been in San Francisco, doing it privately... Then a cousin of hers, who had been out here and graduated from the University, Anna McNeill, took over the San Francisco foffice; and whe made her living after that, because some teachers still went to private agencies.

Riess: What was oyour mother like? How would oyou describe her?

Cheney: Well, now, how would you describe your...?

Riess: Was she dynamic?

Cheney: She wasn't dynamic. [Laughs] It occurred to me last night, as I was walking down Piedmont Avenue and a nice young girl smiled at me, that my mother said to me one time, "Of course, I can't know all the students, but I got from our home here at College Avenue and I just smile at everybody who looks intelligent." [Laughter] (Her office, I guess, at that time was in California Hall, which had just been built. Her first office was nin South Hall, which next to the president's office. She was always, for some reason, next to the Ppresident's office.) She walked across the campus every day; so that was her way of getting around.

But she was dynamic in a way, and she must have had a sense of innovation--not a revolutionary like me, for instance, I was the wild man of the family. My father was very conservative politically and in a literary way, you might say. It was the University, though, that corrupted me into being a radical, I thinkk

Cheney: A boy came down from Indiana University to get his PhD degree b by writing about my work in the theater. He said his professor had suggested it would be interesting to see whether Sheldon Cheney really had any effect on the American theater with his Theater Arts magazine he founded, and with his books--I wrote a book called The Art Theater. This boy came down and spent, oh, a week in New Hope. I found him a hotel room, and every day he came and sat down, and I got out all my files, showing him the material that I had about the theater. I'm losing my train... what was your question?

Riess: We were ~~xkx~~ talking about your mother...

Cheney: That was the first question he asked me--how did you get to be a revolutionary?

Riess: Yes, I want to find out, too. You say your father was... Youssaid the University corrupted you, yet your older brother, you said, was...

Cheney: ...absolutely conservative archtype--went to the Beaux Arts. When I got my first book out on modern art, he wrote me and said, "You just can't take that sort of thing seriously; you can't expect people to buy a book like that." That was sixty years ago, and a new edition came out last year; that book's been in print all that time. Well, he was a born conservative.

Cheney: So this boy asked me how I got to be a revolutionary when my family was conservative. Truxton Beale, who was a regent of the University, in 1909 or '10--somewhere along there--offered a prize. He gave a thousand dollars to the University and said, "Now, I'd like to have the University have a prize contest." Unfortunately they divided the thousand dollars into first prize, $600, and second prize, $400, and not a long string of them. This book was a book by Tolstoy, on the slums of Moscow, called What Shall We Do Then? or What Is To Be Done?--there are different translations of it.

I knew nothing at that time about Tolstoy, but here I wanted to be a writer.

Riess: Were you to write an essay on the book?

Cheney: An essay on an interpretation of the book, or what the book could mean to present day American society, and so on--treatment of the slum condition. That's probably where I got more revolutionary ideas, because I begame more or less a social revolutionary. And then, looking into my own field, which was the theater and the arts--at that time I didn't know whether I would go into architecture or landscape architecture, perhaps..

Riess: What were you studying? What were your courses?

Cheney: In college I had, of course, majored in architecture and English--writing. We had a very good man, Chauncey Wells--Professor Wells. Of

Cheney: course, I was brought up in this tradition ofsSill [?]... Do you know that this Christmas I was sent a check for $33 and a thirdy-three and a third dollars royalty won Sill's books? Sills was teaching at the University. I've tried to trace that down, and finally, I think, I've found out that Sill somehow gave his estate to Millicent Shinn--you remember Millicent Shinn, who wrote the famous book on child psychology? This royalty came to her, and somehow she gave to my father--or maybe to my mother--the rights to Sill's... The copyrights are out; there's no copyright that would be good at this time. But the Houghton-Mifflin Company, being a decent outfit, in getting out a jubilee edition or something, said they ought to make a token payment to Sill's heirs. [Laughs] So, if it were my father or mother there were three of us who share it; so I get a third of a hundred dollars, after all these years [laughs].

I took English and architecture, and then the usual.

Riess: Architecture was John Galen Howard?

Cheney: Yes. I'll tell you about that, if I didn't already--am I repeating myself?

Riess: No, not at all.

Cheney: In those days you couldn't have an AB degree without Greek, as well as Latin. So I had a msmattering of Greek--two years--and Latin, and then French. The French didn't do me much good when I got to France [laughter].

Cheney: But here's the thing about the Architecture Department. My brother went through the Architecture Department; he was wone of the first architecture students when John Galen Howard came to the University. John Galen Howard and his wife came to our house. Father had a kind of a center for, particularly, writers, but also for any of the [?] who drifted in. So I remember John Galen Howard and his wife coming, just about the time I was entering college. Then my brother decided to study this with him.

I got to looking around, and I found that under the new architecture department there wrewere a lot of courses in art that weren't in the art department--pen and ink rendering, a watercolor class, a class in modeling. The rulebook said that if you have so many units in a department, you can major in that department. So I go to work, and I pile up these three art classes, and history of architecture, and I don't know what else. At the end of my senior year I go around to Mr. Howard's office, and I say, "I'm proud to be graduating as a major in architecture." He said, "You can't major in architecture; you didn't take any architectural design." So I showed him the rules, and he finally said he would have to let me through, but it would never happen again [laughter]. So I don't think there's any other major in architecture who didn't become an architect through architectural design study.

Riess: Who was teaching the art classes--the drawing classes?

Cheney: Perham Nahl--I don't know if Perham Nahl was teaching..the watercolor--the man whose name I couldn't think of last night. I had classes with Perham Nahl in the next two or three years--my junior and senior years. That was after we induced the California School of Arts and Crafts--didn't induce it; there was no such school. But, you see, the Mark Hopkins--this I told you.

Riess: Yes, you talked about that yesterday, and I think it's such an interesting bit of history.

Cheney: The founding of that school, as I guess I said yesterday, was because you couldn't have nude models on the campus [laughs], and we had to have a school... Of course, my connection was that I could bring students down from the Ark, and therefore I didn't have to pay any tuition at the school.

Riess: As you went through these classes, could you see your life evolving--what you really thought you were going to do when you got out?

Cheney: Well, I had this ambition to write. At that time I didn't know whether I wanted to be an artist or a writer. To finish the beginning of that story as a writer, and how I got corrupted, I won the second prize--I wond the $500 in the Truxton Beale [contest]. Professor Hart showed me that when I was in the other day; he had a copy of it in the files.

Cheney: Then it just happened that I won another prize from a national magazine, and I thought I could be a writer.

Riess: So you're saying that you give a lot of credit to the encouragement that you got.

Cheney: Oh, it was good...at least this last course that I had with Professor Channcey Wells, which was Rapid Writing. We had to turn in a thesis--something every meeting, three times a week, probably, during the year. It was good training. At that time I didn't do much for the college paper. I had been editor of the high school paper, but somehow I got sidetracked and, as I told you, I ran this little paper called the Bookplate Booklet. Then, after I got out--that was several years after--I wrote my first book, and then I started Theater Arts magazine, and planned to publish it in the same way here in Berkeley.

Riess: When you talk about yourself being a revolutionary, was that in your political thinking, too?

Cheney: Well, it probably began more oreless politically, but in art I just got this idea that nobody'd written a book on an introduction to modern art, for instance,

Riess: How was it spoken of in your classes? What was your academic contact with modern art?

Cheney: All the classes at the University at that time were very conservative, naturally; but somehow, down at the School of Arts and Crafts we learned a little about people like Rodin and Maillol, who were

Cheney: mild revolutionaries, you might say. Rodin, at the end of his life, of course, did the Balzac and other revolutionary works; but most of his life he was realist, you might say.

But we learned about those people, and at the time of the 1915 exposition over in San Francisco there was a good deal of revolutionary art. As a matter of fact, I wrote an Art Lover's Guide to the Exposition; but I wasn't modern yet, because I chose the conservative--that is, they weren't conservative at that time in/peoples' most mind because they were impressionistic, which was a departure from real realism, you might say.

Did you know there was a whole room of Kokoshka's work at that exposition? Those paintings were lost. Somewhere, someday, somebody's going to find those Kokoshka paintings here, and they're worth--oh, I was going to say hundreds of thousands of dollars. They got lost in the storage before they went back; at least that's what they told me in Germany and Austria, where they would have gone to.

Riess: They were out here for that fair?

Cheney: The exposition and the fine arts...

Riess: I was thinking that Galka Scheyer, when she brought out the Blue Four, first brought...

Cheney: No, I know that Kokoshka's things came to San Francisco. I tried to trace them down when I was out in the 'thirties, but I didn't have any luck. Of course, I told you, didn't I, about how I happened to know German expressionism and got stuck in Germany?

Riess: No.

Cheney: I talk to the art people and the theater people so much that I don't know what I told you.

Riess: I want to hear about that, but I want to pick up a couple of loose ends in my mind. You've described yourself as a revolutionary, and as not going to settle down and get that teaching credential and to the safe thing. How did your parents act about this?

Cheney: I think they thought it was all right. I remember my father saying, when I went East (when Sam Hume, as I told you, got this little subsidy for me to take the Theater Arts project East), "You'll land in New York and you'll never come back." But, being a writer himself, why, he thought that was all right. I think my mother was always scared. Well, she had reason to be scared that I'd go broke [laughs] every so often, which I did.

I don't need to explain this, but my first wife was not strong and had a nervous breakdown. We came back to Berkeley; we extended her life, really, by going and living in Europe. We came back here. To the extent that that, perhaps, was partly caused by the kind of life that a young writer and his family lived, it may be that she was right. But she [May Cheney] got so that she liked the fact that I wrote books. You know, people would think, well, he must have something. ~~She~~ My brother, who stayed a conservative, actually took her to Gertrude Stein's apartment to see these terrible things that the moderns were doing. And here I was writing books about these same people--Picasso, Matisse, and all the rest of them. But he took my mother when she came over, when

Cheney: his first child was born, which would be her first grandchild. She made the trip to Paris, and he took her to Gertrude Stein's apartment to see that.

Riess: Did you ever get to Gertrude Stein's apartment?

Cheney: I never was in her apartment; I never met Gertrude Stein, even. I had these manuscripts, which I gave to the department, because Gertrude Stein spread around a certain number of manuscripts--typescripts--fearing that she was not going to be remembered. She wanted a lot of people to have scripts; so they were given to me by a friend of Gertrude Stein, Mrs. [Charlotte] Macks, a San Francisco woman. Gerstle Mack was her son, wasn't he? He wrote a book on Cezanne, and he wrote a book on Toulouse Lautrec. I knew him in New York.

My mother, of course, knew all these people--the Steins and the Macks and the Sutros.

Riess: Did that imply a large social life for your mother?

Cheney: Frankly, the reason she was close to Mrs. Sutro was, I think, the fact that she hooked [helped?] her into bringing the Sutro Library to the campus, as the Bankcroft Library came.

Riess: So she was most interested in what these people...

Cheney: Well, sure. Of course, all these people were interested, you might say, in education. Mother had a good deal to do with--I don't know whether I put this properly--keeping UCLA from being a bigger institution than Berkeley; because, of course, her whole loyalty was to Berkeley, as a graduate and as an officer of the University. Of course, she had for years provided teachers for

BICENTENNIAL COMMITTEE
BERKELEY RETIRED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

PRIDE in BERKELEY

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Bicentennial Committee of the Berkeley Retired Teachers Association is assembling material on notables who attended Berkeley schools. The Berkeley Gazette is giving space in its columns for publicizing the findings of the Committee. Either eminent families or individuals will be featured. The series will run on Tuesday and Friday through 1976.

SHELDON CHENEY

Sheldon Cheney graduated from Berkeley High School in 1904. He received his A.B. degree from the University of California in 1908. His two major professional interests were the arts and books.

He is the son of Warren Cheney, editor of the Overland Monthly, novelist, poet and Berkeley business man. His mother was May L. Cheney, head of the Placement Office at the University for many years. Cheney Hall, campus dormitory was named in her honor.

Sheldon Cheney was born into an atmosphere of literary ambition and activity. The family home in Berkeley was a gathering place for literary celebrities, and "a boy with dreams in his head" was likely to be thrilled by the visits of Jack London, Mary Austin and Lincoln Steffens.

The arts and crafts movement had not yet lost its impetus in the West, and he was early drawn into a concern with book arts. He earned his first money as a designer and engraver of book plates. While in college, he founded and edited a quarterly for designers and collectors of book plates.

He soon turned to the profession which was to claim his professional attention for twenty years: the theater. He plunged into the "new" movement in the theater. He has been known ever since as an uncompromising modernist. He sought public and student understanding with his first three books: "The New Movement in the Theater" (1914), "The Open Air Theater" (1917 and "The Art in five years endeavor on Broadway, chiefly with the productions of the Actor's Theater and of Augustin Duncan, and in the writing of a new standard history entitled "The Theater: 3,000 years of Drama, Acting and stagecraft," "The Decoration," an international pioneering study in this country, followed in 1928.

SHELDON CHENEY

From 1926 to 1931 he and his family lived in various parts of Europe, three more books about the theater resulting, all along "modern" channels.

In 1930 "The New World Architecture" appeared, a first in this country. Mr. Cheney spent two and a half years working on the monumental "A World History of Art" published in 1937. His second wife, Martha Candler, a fellow-writer, collaborated with him on this history, and later they brought out a review of the machine-conditioned industrial design, titled "Art and the Machine."

Later, lecture tours took precedence over writing. These were mostly given on college campuses. Always a liberal if not a radical, in the field of innovations in art and drama, his fight has been against academia in all fields of art and particularly against the over-intellectual approach.

His latest book published in 1968 is on "Sculpture of the World." After many years in the East, he has recently returned to Berkeley, but he is still keeping his hand in as a free-lance writer.

Charles H. Cheney, elder brother of Sheldon, was a graduate in architecture at UC-Berkeley in 1905. He studied at Beaux Arts in Paris from 1907 to 1910. He was technical consultant in city planning in a number of California cities, such as Santa Barbara, Berkeley and Palo Alto. He was secretary of the California Conference on City Planning from 1914 to 1928. He was consultant to the Housing Authority, Los Angeles County 1928 to 1929, and the author of "Major Traffic Street Plan and Park System" for Portland, Oregon and of innumerable planning and zoning laws and ordinances. He died in 1949.

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Cotton decrease

Cheney: the normal school, from which UCLA was ofounded. She went to the legislature on educational committees, and had a good deal to do with the start, probably, of the state colleges, as distinct from the state universities.

[Discussion of state colleges and universities]

Cheney: My father was a graduate in the early days of Hastings.

Riess: I can't believe the number of things that you have all graduated from [laughter].

Cheney: He, as a matter of fact, took a degree in mining engineering, because having eyes that weren't quite strong enough for some things, they thought that would be a good thing. And then somehow he went to Hastings and got a law degree, and never used either engineering or law, but became a writer and a real estate man.

Riess: I should think that he would have been so pleased at what you had decided to do with your life. I mean, you did get directly to all...

Cheney: Well, I'm pleased with my life, in certain ways, certainly. But you have a certain number of tragedies and you try to olive up to it--like my first wife dying. Two of the children, as a matter of fact, were able to go out and make their living, and I put the third one into International House. Then I had to go back to make a living. Really, as a writer, unless you are a headliner, you have to be near New York. And that's the real reason...For a great number of years I was in Connecticut, but that was in the 'thirties. My first wife died, and then I married a fellow writer. And for

Cheney: thirty-eight years we lived together. The way things turned out, my children married, settled down--some in Washington. My daughter didn't marry; the other two boys married.

My wife had a phobia about cities, you might say--at any rate, a desire to be out in the far distance somewhere from everything, and I had more or less [a phobia, too?]. So the result was that the two of us lived during the last ten or fifteen years almost like hermits in New Hope. We had this place--made over a barn as a house--and we had twenty-five acres of woods behind us, with a minimum of social contact. I'll say it was one of the most happy marriages you could imagine. I shouldn't say this, but we never had one real quarrel in thirty-eight years [laughs]. That's really good.

Riess: What I hear in that is that when people are really doing what they love to do...

Cheney: We were both... That's one thing that's rwrong with American life. Here I marry this writer; we marry when both of us are in debt--I because my first wife had been in the hospital for years, and she never quite made it as a novelist or a short story writer, and had a few debts around. We decided we would marry, partly because she had an apartment in New York and I had an apartment, and we could omove them into one together [laughs]. That wasn't the real reason [laughs]. We lived in New York [clears his throat]--my voice goes off every little while, but I'll make it behave. You

You marry somebody like that, who happens to be a very

Cheney: beautiful person who wants to write. Now, we're both in debt, can't afford a house and servants. Immediately she is, as these women's lib people say, enslaved, you might say. I had had more books out than she had, and so she felt I had to go to the desk every morning and write. But she writes to a certain extent--articles, and we wrote one book together--Art and the Machine, a study of modern industrial design, which got very good notices and was the only one of my books that I was concerned in that hasn't been reprinted by either a pirate or by one of my own publishers.

Riess: Were you one of the first people to see the beauty in design? I know the Museum of Modern Art has been kind of a pioneer in...

Cheney: Well, I had been--again, it goes back to that idea of being a revolutionary; some fellow said, "Anything new in the arts, why, Mr. Cheney picks it up." One of the reviewers said, "Typically in his line." In one publication that the Chicago Tribune got out--it was like the New York Times Book Review--a reviewer said it was like the Book of the Week"; every week he picked one book. So we were pleased at that.

But I had been for years an advocate of sheer design, you might say, and that's where I departed from my older brother, who was Aa Beaux Arts man, and he stuck by the...

Riess: [?]

Cheney: Well, not too much. He did a very good job down at Palos Verdes Estates, as resident there, except that it's all in the Mediterranean style, and he wuuldn't let anybody built a Frank

Cheney: Lloyd Wright house. And, of course, Frank Lloyd Wright was one of my gods and one of my close friends, you know. To that extent it seemed to me he did overdo the conservative side of architecture.

But the machine thing--I never went as far as, for instance, an architect like Noytre, or the big international group like Phillip Johnson and the people who followed the international style. I always thought that Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe, who also used the horizontal line and so on, were a better influence on the young architects.

Riess: Were those people, then, influence by the Bauhaus?

Cheney: Particularly the machine-age people. I went to the Bauhaus. If you ever get hold of that book, you'll find that I was all for the Bauhaus. The Bauhause was not one of these stiff, concrete...

[End of tape 2, side 1]

Cheney: ...This is a joke because, getting away from theatrical people--getting away from, I won't exactly say queer people [laughter]--and moving to New Hope eventually... That's a kind of a joke. What [Worth Griffin, University of Oregon at Pullman] reminded me of this was if this man was influenced by the Primer [A Primer of Modern Art]... When we got ready, we bought twenty-five acres on simply a sheer hillside. There was an old barn on it, and we thought we'd have to tear down this old barn. You know, some people tear them down because they have four by four beams and the immense frameworks. There happened to be the husband

Cheney: of a friend of ours in New Hope. They were divorced, and he had the right to come down from Harvard--he was one of the teachers of architecture at Harvard, next to [Jose Luis] Sert. Sert was still, I guess, the head of the architectural department.

Anyway, we hear that this important architect is coming down to New Hope because sombody's talking about a supermarket complex or something, and he is allowed to come down to see the children of this friend of ours, his divorced wife. So we latch on to this arthitect, Houston Jackson [?]. He comes over and looks at our hillside, and we tell him we'd like to build a cottage, not too big a house; there were only the two of us--she had no children, and all my children were settled by that time.

Almost the first remark he made was, "It's appropraate that I build a house for you, because more than anybody else you changed me into a modern." I said we wanted a modern house, of course. He came over and looked at this barn, and said that with that slate roof and that frame and concrete foundation we had half a house there. So that's the way we happened to make over the old house [barn], and this architect made it. He made it look pretty good, but--it pleases us--the good looks are on the upper side toward the woods [laughs], and the street side... When you ask me whether it's good, why, it's good enough architecture [laughs].

Riess: I can imagine all the trees and the hill, and how beautiful it must be.

Cheney: Well, it really was beautiful this spring, particularly.

Riess: Now, maybe I can take you back to where we left off talking about the Bauhaus. You were also going to talk about how you were involved with German expressionism.

Cheney: You know, all the Americans, practiaally, who went to Europe to study, would naturally head for Paris. Of course, Paris was the center for the early part of the revolution in modern art. The people--Picasso, Matisse, and all these others: Braque--they were all Frenchmen. Or, no, Picasso was more Spanish; he's an adopted Frenchman, I suppose.

So practically everything that was written in this country, or in England, as far as that goes, had a French accent to it, and appreciation. It's right that cubism and futurism--no, futurism was Italian. They did get futurism, and in England they had an offshoot; that was vorticism.[?].

But I go over, my first trip to Europe--that would be in 1923--and first I gotto the Amsterdam International Stagecraft Exhibition, the first big wone that bit [big ?] them. That's where I met Gordon Craig first. Then from Amsterdam I went direct to Berlin. Here I am, my first trip to Europe, and I want to see all these other places; I have an itinerary to take me down dto Dresden and to some of the other cities. It was later that I went to the Bauhaus; or it might have been that first trip, because I did get it into the architectural book.

Cheney: Well, it really was beautiful [illegible].

Hines: Now, maybe I can take you back. [illegible] ... [illegible]
Bauhaus. You were also noted [illegible] ... [illegible]
with German expressionism.

Cheney: You know, all the Expressionists, except Gropius, [illegible]
study, [illegible] to Paris. [illegible] the
center for the [illegible] the revolution [illegible]
people--[illegible] [illegible] of [illegible]
of "Perplexity. Or [illegible] was how [illegible]
Romanticism," I guess.

So practically anyone in [illegible] or [illegible]
[illegible] to Paris to [illegible] and
experiencing. [illegible] [illegible] and [illegible],
was Dadaism. They [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
different [illegible] was [illegible].

I [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]--[illegible]
in fiber [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
the first [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
Greek [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
e, my first [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible]. I [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
[

Cheney: Anyway, I get stuck in Berlin for something like six weeks. Here's all my time before I can get back to see Europe.

Riess: Why was that?

Cheney: Because there was a railway strike, or a general strike--no trains and, of course, in those days no planes. So for all these weeks I'm stuck in Berlin. There's a very progressive gallery there, der Sturm Gallery, and so I meet some of the artists there. I go every day, perhaps, to the galleries, and learn about German expressionism; I learn about the Blue Four. Of course, I had known about Kokoshka already, -ecause I...

Riess: From the Palace of Fine Arts.

Cheney: And I had kept up to a certain extent--I had studied up the background, I suppose, before I went to Europe. But, anyway, I got this idea that "expressionism" was the name we ought to put on the modern movement.

Riess: Oh, that was not a...?

Cheney: Well, all these French-trained people... It's a German word--
[That was?] ?
Expressionismus. /The only place it was used [was] by the Museum of Modern Art in the early years. So I come back, and finally I write that book, Expressionism and Art, and I think it did change the usage. If you wanted to know what the last period in America is, it's abstract expressionism; and the name has stuck. Cubism was too small a name; futurism, some people use it still--generally
a
the people who haven't read much about art, because it was/very

Cheney: Anyway, I got stuck in Berlin for [illegible] time of [illegible] weeks. There's all my time before I can get one to go across.

Riess: Why was that?

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Riess: Oh, that was [illegible]...

Cheney: Well, all these French-trained [illegible]... It's a German term, Expressionismus. The only [illegible] it [illegible] [was] [illegible] of Modern Art in [illegible]. Finally I wrote that book, Expressionism in Art, and I think [illegible] the name. If you [illegible] to know [illegible] [illegible], it's [illegible] has [illegible] was too small a name [illegible] [illegible]

Cheney: narrow type of art as compared with expressionism. But the way I got into it was through that accident [laughs] and enforced stay in Germany.

Riess: Did you get to know intimately any of the artists during that enforced stay?

Cheney: There was a German, Valentiner, who had been brought to this country, who became the director of the Metropolitan Museum, our greatest museum. ~~This~~ after he gave up the position at the Metropolitan he went to Detroit; I guess I had known him in Detroit, rather than in New York, because when I went with Sam Hume to start the magazine in Detroit--I was there a year--I met Dr. Valentiner. And he turns up in Berlin during those days, and I guess he couldn't get out.

This was the time when the German mark was going down, and it finally went out entirely. Valentiner said, one day--of course, I was a kid as compared with Valentiner; he was a veteran in the modern art field--"There's an artist family over here, and if you would like to go and meet them, and if you could buy only one or two little things at perhaps four or five dollars each, why, it would help them so immensely." Because a dollar at that time, maybe, would get a hundred thousand marks or two hundred thousand marks; later we got millions. (You have an animal on your...)

Riess: (Oh, a squirrel!)

Cheney: I didn't meet any of the really great people until...

Riess: Who was that artist?

Cheney: His name was Max Kaus [?], one of the lesser of the German expressionist school, as compared with Schmidt-Rotluff [Karl] or Kirchner [Ernst Ludwig], or Hofer [Carl]--you could think of three

Cheney: or four. He was a very good artist, and Valentiner had quite a number of things at the Detroit Institute, I know, while he was there. We went out, and Iddid buy a couple of watercolors and some prints. When I got here, I found that one of the prints was matted, and I found there was an extra picture in the back of it [laughs]; so I have one more than I ever paid for. Insofar as they may want them, I'll send those out to the campus--the new art museum here.

Riess: Have you done much buying or speculating in art over the years?

Cheney: [laughs] How would a writer have enough money?toBut didn't I tell you about buying a Paul Klee painting?

Riess: No, that was somebody else you told.

Cheney: I don't know whether this aought to be recorded, but...

Riess: That probably means it's good; go ahead. [laughter]

Cheney: I went over on this trip, and I didn't have any money; I was on a shoestring. I think I told you in the taping before that I got the idea that you could live for $1,800 a year with a family. So I leave half... Oh, and I got two book commissions, each five hundred dollars, advance, to write the Primer of Modern Art and the book The New World of Architecture. At that time I was doing something called Creative Architecture.

Anyway, I go over on a shoestring, and I buy these two or three things, which are good. One of them became quite famous because I established the School for Openmindedness opposite the

Cheney: campus when I came back in the 'thirties. It was the one painting I showed most to my students over there. At that time the University art school was not/an expressionistic art department [laughs].

You asked me if I invested in anything. I think it's a sign that I knew something about modern art, because I bought a Paul Klee painting and a statue by (who's the otheroone? Barauk [?] and...).. Anyway, I bought a Paul Klee painting, and what do you think I paid for a good... I thought it was one of the most interesting things that I had seen in modern art--my idea of what modern art should be. What do you suppose I had to pay for that?

Riess: $1,200?

Cheney: Well, it cost me seven dollars by the time I got back to America. I couldn't pay for it when I saw it in the gallery in Dresden; I didn't have enough money, after being in Berlin all that time. But I sent over... no, I suppose I sent over five dollars; the rest was the cost of getting it to America [laughs] and through customs, and so on.

Then I bought this statue, which was a bigger proposition. Those are the only two fully professional pictures, I think, that I ever was able to buy. That was a ninety dollar proposition. The same way, I had to send money over after I got home, and have it shipped to America; it cost me ninety dollars all together.

Incidentally, we were living in Scarborough, about Terrytown along the Hudson. We had an old house hwe'd made over, and we had

Cheney: one of the old grand pianos. So I sent this statue--it was, oh, about this high [demonstrates]--and set it on the piano. My family, they're not sold on modern art, of xcourse--you know, most people weren't. I, being queer, was. So they called this "Susie."" We set Susie up, and the family isn't particularly pleased with Susie [laughter]. I go broke [laughs], which happens after you make a European trip on a shoestring, and so I have to sell Susie.

My first publisher by that time had moved over... This was the one I referred to the other day as a crook, because he didn't pay royalties to his authors. I go into New York one day, and he's taken over the Anderson Auction Gallery. So he saya, "You've been in Germany; you ought to know I'm going to have a sale of somebody's collection of German modern art. The one thing I'm short of is sculpture. Do you know anybody that's got any German sculpture?"

I said, "I've got one. I think I have to sell it because I have to write this book." I didn't have enough to write the book, so I took it down. He sold that thing for six hundred dollars, and I only grabbed two hundred dollars of it; but I did get the difference between ninety dollars and six hundred dollars, and that helped me to write the Primer of Modern Art.

Riess: It didn't tempt you to go into that kind of very profitably business? I wouldn't have had...

Cheney: Well, I would have had to go back, and probably/the mark by that ...it time/was due to the [inflation]. I'd hate to tell you how many

Cheney: thousand dollars I got, well, just last year for that Paul Klee painting. I said it oughtn't to be recorded, because you might tell the tax collector [laughs]; and some tax collectors think you ought to pay on art. There is a clause, somewhere in the law that your capital gains--if it's an original work of art it isn't subject. And yet some of the art dealers have told me they have had to pay, and I sold it out of all reason of the price of it. Well, I'm getting off... But you did ask me...

Riess: That's definitely worth hearing. I like hearing very successful stories like that.

I've just seen some Carl Hofer recently. I hadn't even known about him, but there's a woman whom I'm interviewing in San Francisco, Helen Salz, who has a couple of Hofers--beautiful paintings.

How did you see enough reproductions or originals to write the Primer of Modern Art? Where did you see them?

Cheney: There had only been one book on modernism published in this country, and that was a man in Chicago. I forget what the title of the book is now. But, of course, all of us, I think, had begun to read Clive Bell and (who was the other Englishman)--two people who really sold modernism to the English, as far as it could be sold to the English. They were the last to be reconciled to modernism.

Riess: They were very happy with Ruskin, weren't they?

Cheney: [Laughs] I happen to be an admirer of Ruskin, as a matter of fact, but I don't think he did anything for modern art. You raad, as a

Cheney: student of art, and then I nknew something about modern architecture. On that trip, I guess, I met JosephHoffman in Vienna; I met Gropius in Berlin. Then I went to the Bauhaus. I started to say, when you asked me whether I had met any of the great painters, Feininger [Lyonel] I met at the Bauhaus. Of course, he came from this country, and therefore could speak English. My German was so bad I couldn't even have talked with the Germans if I'd met them. I don't know to this day who the boy was who took me through the Bauhaus. I've often thought it might have been one of those famous people.

Riess: Were these Germans very articulate--sort of theorists, and they knew what they were...?

Cheney: In architecture, for instance, the early architecture was Viennese--that was JoseffHoffman, not Hans Hoffman. He did that Stockli mansion in Brussels. I went to see that. I saw a good many of the monuments, you might say, of... And in Amsterdam I met up with a man named Weidefeld [?]. He was one of the ones, I think, who published the famous Wendingen edition of Frank Lloyd Wright's first book in Dutch. No, it was in English; he put it in both of the two languages. I know now there's an English edition which says the famous Wendingen Wright folume. He took my around.

Here's a sidelight. Nobody had ever put Wright into a book in English; there were three German books on Wright's work before there was a word about him in English. The American Institute of

Cheney: Architects had just gotten out a book about the modern architects in America, Wright's name not mentioned. So I said I was going to put Wright in. But here's a sidelight on it. I go to Amsterdam and I meet up with this man, Weidefeld. He says he'd like to take me around and see the architecture. Of course, at that time a man named Oud was a very important man in the modern movement. So he takes me around, and pretty soon he shows me a house that looks quite familiar. He said, "Oh, yes, we call that the Frank Lloyd Wright style." They already had caught on to Wright, before anybody in this country had really become to imitate Wright.

Riess: You certainly had your work cut out, to educate this country about [Wright]..

Cheney: Well, the book had something to do with educating it; yet, there are many educators around [laughs].

Riess: There are so many things I think of as you speak. Everything you say makes five more questions for me. We talked about Wright yesterday, and you talked about showing him allot of Maybeck houses and his response to them. I wondered if he looked at the Greene and Greene house--the Thorson House--and what he thought of that?

Cheney: I don't remember that we went up there. Of course, meeting him I took him to my house. I think then we were living... We had come back in the early thirties, and my first wife was still living then./ I took him to the house on College Avenue. I don't think we

Cheney: went up and looked at the Greene and Greene thing. It was a monument, and it's the only one that's left.

[Telephone interrupts]

Riess: You were talking about Frank Lloyd Wright, and what you showed him. You were talking about taking him to Maybeck's.

Cheney: That's the reason we ididn't get to the Greene and Greene, which is the only one [left??] of that group of interesting houses. But I took him over... He didn't, of course, care about the University. I took him over to Maybeck's--this house where one of my students had the School for Openmindedness. They were a pair of elderly--not elderly, but middle-aged people, and they said to come and see the house. I thought Frank Lloyd Wright was very appreciative of Maybeck's work. Dr. Hart gave me the notion that later Wright was inclined to run Maybeck down as an originator, but certainly the time I spent with him he was very appreciative.

But that day Wright had come up... He'd spent the evening before (I thought I just saw an immense bird, but I guess it was an airplane [laughs], suddenly go by across...)...

Anyway, Wright was appreciative, and I said, "Well, now, I'd like to show you one or two other things. Then I'm going to take you out of town and take you up onto the hills. You will appreciate more a drive over to..." and I was going to take him over to Walnut Creek somewhere, where I knew the country.

[Telephone interrupts]

Riess: You were taking a drive to Walnut Creek?

Cheney: I was going to take him, just to get him out of town. He told me he'd spent the evening before with Albert Einstein, and had stayed up so late, and his voice... He could hardly use his voice properly. So I got concerned, and I said, "Look here, you have a lecture tonight at Berkeley Forum, and I don't think your voice is going to last out."

So he said he was willing to give up the trip, and could I take him to a doctor. Of course, my brother was a doctor here, so I take him to my brother. My brother says, "If you'll gotto your hotel and rest the whole afternoon, and take this that I'll give you, I'll guarantee that you can use your voice this evening."

So I had to take Wright to the hotel--the Durant, by the way. I haven't told them I once brought them a distinguished visitor [laughs]. His voice did recover, and that night he was able to give the lecture.

Riess: Wouldn't you have loved to be in on that conversation between Wright and Einstein?

Cheney: Oh, yes. Well, they would have a lot in common. Both--I was going to say go-getters; it isn't quite the right term, but [laughs]... Wright once told me--this is perhaps later, when he wanted me to be a dean of his school or something--"I had the choise of whether I would take the usual route and knuckle under to instructors and so on, or be somewhat aggressive and push forward. I chose to be aggressive." That was one thing about his character--he wasn't

Cheney: perverse in the sense that my friend Gordon Craig was. Gordon Craig could go off on a tangent, and somebody he'd worked with for a long time just simply cut him off. In fact, I'm not quite sure yet whether he didn't give me the brush-off the last time I tried to get in touch with him. It may have been perfectly all right.

BFrank Lloyd Wright didn't have that, but he was, of course, to the other archetypes, outrageous the way he talked about, for instance, any ordinary city hall, or church, and about the eclectic system in architecture.

Riess: Who did he admire among his contemporaries?

Cheney: I suppose it would go back to the Europeans. Of course his master was (if I should forget that name...)... The American architect that he worked with in the first place... He had a building at the Chicago Exposition, and he did one famous building in St. Louis, I think.

Riess: Is it Sullivan?

Cheney: Yes, Sullivan. Now, how do those names get... You know, Mary Austin told me, "If you lose a name and can't remember it, just go to bed that night, and say to yourself that in the morning it will be there. When you wake up in the morning, that name will pop into your head." And it's true. Of course, being the age I am, I'm more forgetful than you are [laughs], naturally.

Riess: But you know more things; you've got more to forget.

Cheney: Well, I've had a good many experiences in the arts field.

Riess: I feel that I keep interrupting you, but I wonder if we could leap back again into Sam Hume. I'd like to hear about what he was like in college. The two of you were kind of dreaming of what you were going to be; did Sam get to be what he wanted to be?

Cheney: I think Sam did, up to the time he was director of the Greek Theater. Then this thing--I don't know what it was; it was a domestic thing that happened. His first wife certainly felt... I've got a terrible letter from his first wife, and I'm going to write on it when I send it with my files that you must consider that she was the disgruntled wife of Sam. Because I think she runs down Mary Morris and, I think, several... Anyway, it's not for publication anyhow.

But Sam was a prince. He really was a leader. Of course, I, being of a shy nature, and a writer--I was editor of the student paper at Berkeley High School. I went through high school with Sam was [the leader in ?] everything--chairman of every committee, put on the plays, he was an athlete--he ran the hurdles; the best hurdler that probably was ever on the campus, I don't know, maybe they've had some famous one since. But Sam was the leader in everything, and one you could have affection for at the same time.

For one thing, Sam had little money, which was different from some of the others of us. I think all his life... I never knew a thing about his father, but he and his mother slived somewhere

Cheney: down close to Shattuck Avenue; I forget where it was. For instance, he went to Europe and studied with Gordon Craig for I don't know how long. Then he went to Harvard, and all these things do cost [thing?] money. At that time, the only explanation is that he had some[one?] behind.

When we came to college, Sam was what you call out here yell leader; in our gentally civilization of the East they call it cheer leader [laughs]. Anyway, Sam awas yell leader here on the campus. In the same way, he was probably properly [?] at the head of a good many casts. Of course, he acted later in some of the plays that they put on in the Greek Theater, I think. I was surprised to see that both he and Pichel... I was thinking of something that I saw last night. Pichel went down and played Lazarus at the Pasadena Community Theater, which, of course, is one of the really great progressive theaters in this country.

Sam remained a leader, and suddently something happened and he decided that he would get out of the thing he had been in, and he established this book businesss--theater prints, theater books. He sold my original; of course, that was my magazine.

When I went out of Theater Arts--a lot of these things that I graduated from, it was gbecause I was going broke. When I had Theater Arts for three or four years, and it was just at the end of the first world war, along came Kenneth MacGowan and Edith Isaacs. Edith Isaacs had money, and she said they wanted to start a magazine, and didn't I want to let them have the name of my

Cheney: magazine if I wasn't able to carry it on? So they carried on--thirty-eight years, that magazine lasted.

Riess: You weren't able because it was not profitable?

Cheney: It was not profitable; I couldn't even get a $150 a month, that I was speaking of, out of it as a living. Well, we ran into wartime conditions, for one thing.

But Sam had this idea that he must get away. He had established this bookshop. I didn't know he kept the bookshop so long; I thought he did all this business from his house up on the hill. At that time he built a Spanish--what I call a Spanish monastery [laughter], which was unlike Sam. Later he married this perfectly wonderful woman, so far as I remember her, Portia.

Riess: The story is that her name was Maureen and he renamed her.

Cheney: Oh, he did? To be theatrical [laughs].

Riess: I suppose so. You can imagine that that would be quite in keeping.

Cheney: As I started to say, he sold my set of Theater Arts... I sold Theater Arts for $75 or $50 or $150--I forget; it was some trivial sum--to this new management--to Mrs. Isaacs. They took it over and made it a really good, international magazine. But one thing I got out of it was that as long as it continued I was to get a copy. So I had a full set. Sam sold my set out of his bookshop here to the University at Santa Barbara. They had a theater arts/down [department] there. And, you know, those departments were really named for

Cheney: Theater Arts magazine, because Kenneth MacGowan went to Los Angeles in his older days and established the theater department there. So naturally he took the name which I had invented originally here.

Riess: It's a name that makes great sense, too.

Cheney: Well, [laughs] it didn't in those days when I was here, because it was all dramatic department, acting school, and scenic design studio, but nothing about art in the theater.

Riess: When you were here in school, did you get involved at all in dramatics?

Cheney: I played a super in three plays in the Greek Theater, and then in one or two of the class plays. But I never acted.

Riess: I thought the English Club was the group that did dramatics. The English Club started in 1902, and they were doing dramatic productions?

Cheney: I remember being a member of the English Club, and yet I can't remember the plays. Most of the plays I remember are the class plays--there was a junior play and a senior play. Before the Greek Theater was built there was the glade, where the Theater was built, which was a natural open-air stage.

Riess: Bean Weed's Amphitheater. Did you know Ben Weed?

Cheney: I'd forgotten the name Ben Weed, but that comes back. What year was the Greek Theater built?

Riess: It was built in 1903, and apparently the Golden Age of the Greek Theater was 1905. I think that's the year, maybe, that Bernhardt

Riess: and Margart Anglin...

Cheney: I can't remember the names of the actresseswho put on these three Greek plays, (She went back to the New York stage later), and those are the three I sup'ed in.

Riess: Was it Margaret Anglin?

Cheney: It might have been one of Margaret Anglin's; that name registers to a certain extent. Of course, I went back East and I got into the Actor's Theater. I had these thirty-actor-sponsor-backers, and I was executive secretary beginning with Laurette Taylor, Ethel Barrymore, and James Howell, and all those other people.

Riess: Were you a publicist for them?

Cheney: I went to the theater; I was play reader. Then I took over the publicity department; I was press agent. Then suddenly our director, who was not as well known an actor as the first director, Augustin Duncan, who was, fof course, Isadora's brother; later I worked with him a great deal. The director between Augustin Duncan and Dudley Diggs awas a man named--it tdoesn't matter what his name was. Anyway, he faded out at the end of a year, at the only time we had a Broadway success in the house. So he said to me one day that he couldn't climb these stories--our offices were on the third floor and we didn't have any elevator in the theater, of course. He said, "My heart...
/"I'm going to give you my job and my slsalary."

Well, I'd never made $150 a week before--$150 a week was big money in those days! So I sat in as acting director for one

Cheney: year--not a year, a half year. Then I got fired [laughs].

Riess: You got fired? Why?

Cheney: Because I insisted that a theater that was... Potentially, I think, at the rate we were going that summer, we would have taken in a half a million dollars in a year. I said to myself, "I've never had any business training; I'm in the arts. I have no right trying to run a theater of this sort. We ought to have a business manager." I knew a man who was business manager for Arthur Hopkins, the great producer on Broadway--and the best producer on Broadway at that time. So the board finally agreed we'd bring this manager in.

The manager came in and I won't say he ran me out of my job, because I saw the logic immediately. Here was Dudley Diggs, who had been elected in my place as director of the theater. I had moved over to executive secretary. Here the business manager came in, and we were paying three top salaries. I was the one that, naturally, was eased out. I wasn't eased out until I picked Candida, for Katherine Cornell. Did I tell you about that?

Riess: No.

Cheney: I went to this theater, and I had a little list of plays that I thought a progressive theater ought to do. I found, curiously, that all the people running this theater wanted a Broadway success, and they didn't believe that a Shaw, Ibsen, or Pirandello play would succeed.

Cheney: They'd say, "We're not getting the plays." I said I had a list of plays. They said, "Oh, that's art stuff." So they said, "You organize those as matinees--special matinees."

So I organized them. One thing I did, by being nearly a producer, was to put on Clare Eames as Hedda Gabler; that was one of the best. We put on Servant in the House--failed to get Walter Hampton, who was the original and made the play, probably--and that wasn't a success. The last one I did, at the time I was just leaving the theater... I said, "I want to do Candida as my last production with the theater." One of the others spoke up and said, Katherine Cornell would make a nice Candida. She had a contract to begin two months or a month an a half later on Broadway in some other play, but she said she would play the matinee.

So she played in the matinee. She doesn't know to this year that I plicpicked Candida for her. Then she went on to make a success of it all across the country, and revived it later, I think. I did actually pick that play--because I had seen it done in Berkeley somewhere. Somebody, in the early days when Shaw had not done very much, did it here; and I thought it was a wonderful play. I always had it at the head of my little list of things I wanted to do [laughs].

Riess: You've always gotten into risky things and convinced people that it would work.

Cheney: Well, that's the life of a... Of course, look at the history of the University Museum here, the University theater--you didn't have

Cheney: any theater, student theater, just three or four years ago; you didn't have any museum until three years ago. And for fifty years I agitated for those things. As I told you, I wrote a book called Why the Art Museum Gives you a Headache. I may have started it before we came back in the 'thirties--I probably started it and got the idea in Europe there -- But ~~there~~ just was no museum.

[End of interview]